

Rememory

"It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:

It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,

And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'

We are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;

One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." -Alfred, Lord Tennyson

“Sign here please,” the suit had told him. “It’s for the deed to the house, sir.”

“And why am I buying the deed to the house again?”

“Because you wanted to seclude yourself to a tiny tract of farmland in Soledad, sir.”

“Huh, I see. You know, there was once this rare type of grape that used to grow in Northwestern Italy, and it would turn into the most beautiful pink wine, given the correct conditions. Anything else and it would rot away in use and value. The Russian de Morgan I believe it was called. By God, it tasted like midnight on the lips.”

His eyes shone with lucidity as his neurons fired in the way they once did; if for only a brief moment, he was himself again.

“Are you certain you want to do this sir?” The suit said hesitantly. “Moving to some worn down, broken house, alone in your condition, all to grow some grape...”

“So the house is a fixer-upper, but I find that I am no paradise either. So the house is old and outdated, but we are both from another time. So I forget the trivial moments, but I remember the important memories. So I want to grow a grape, but that is what I want, and that is that.”

He seemed adamant, but there was still some sense of uncertainty, some hint of confusion present in his voice. He picked up the pen that had been laying on the nahogamy desk and brought it to the paper, staring blankly at the line where his name was supposed to go.

“Now what’s my name?”

The suit, defeated, obliged him. “Albert Lazarus Zaroff, sir.”

With a loose grip on reality, and fantasies and wonderlands’ hold tightening, he signed his initials on the line.

The suit had dropped him off with everything he needed: clothes, tools, toiletries, and some other items. After reminding him once more why he was there, the suit said his goodbyes and Albert was left, alone with his lonely home.

He stood facing the front of the house and examined his surroundings, drinking in the crisp air and the ubiquitous mountains. His vineyard lay to his left, the sticks protruding from the

earth to be where his Rusing de Mongrel grape would bud. His gaze was lost in the miles of grass and the billows of blue sky that flowed in all directions.

Bringing his focus back to the house before him, he saw that the foundation was exposed; it was visible, vulnerable, vital. The house itself fared no better, just as exposed with holes gashed in the wooden floorboards and walls, as though planks were simply ripped off to be better used elsewhere. The house itself was dilapidated, deserted, determined. It was barren in both form and function, save a spired roof on the left where one could hang a weather vane. It was barren in the long valley between the mountains of Soledad; miles and miles of grapes pervaded the land, giving the distance where vision began to blur a distinct hue from the vibrancy of the grapes; but on his own plot of land, the land in which he stood with nothing but his luggage, his grape seeds, and his rapidly waning days, he would-- he couldn't quite remember at this moment. Perhaps it had something to do with midnight. He moved his stuff into the house.

Albert had awoken in his king-sized memory-foam mattress the next day with pink filling his field of vision. He reached for his face, and peeled off a sticky note from his forehead. It had two sentences.

Plant the grapes. You have Alzheimer's disease.

It was an odd to thing to read from a note stuck to your face first thing in the morning, much less believe. It was too early in the morning for this. Pondering the legitimacy of the note, Albert arose from his bed to go get some coffee.

First off, the grapes. Would it have been a stretch of the imagination to say that he had written it? On the surface, there didn't appear to be a malignant motive for planting grapes, so maybe he would have written something like that, rather than someone trying to gaslight him, especially considering the second sentence.

Alzheimer's would explain why he would write the note: to remind himself of things he would forget the next day. But could he have a disease such as that this early in life? The idea was absurd for a man in his mid-thirties, but the recesses of his mind told him it was not so preposterous.

He reluctantly agreed to obey the note. He took the bag of grape seeds and hopped down from the front doorway. He took a hoe that was lying against the wall and began to plow the non-arable ground, preparing a plot of land seemingly belonging to another time, another world, for a grape that was out of season, for a man who hadn't sipped midnight since he had black hair.

He had plowed, fertilized, and planted the vineyard over the course of the day, and admired his work when he was done.

"Oh, what's that quote by Lord Tennyson..." Albert tried to remember the wording, but could only produce a halfwit rendition. "To try, to find, to grind, and not to suffer."

He could stay here forever, gradually fixing the house, slowly adding plank by plank, painting the house in sticky notes and sheets of copy paper. It had been a month since Albert had moved in, and today was the first evening in which he had awoken to unobstructed vision. He arose from his bed to find that it was stained yellow; he had relieved his bowels in his sleep.

Confused about where he was or why he was there, he began to frantically rummage through the waves of sticky notes.

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Find suit. I don't want this anymore.

TEND GRAPES!!!

I can't remember what I was going to write.

All of this felt surreal, like he was in some sort of sick dreamscape in which memory did not apply and the mountains were walls that boxed him in. He struggled to walk to the window, where he found a man staring back at him from the other side. He had glossy, empty eyes, as though he were blankly staring at Albert wherever he looked. He had canvas white hair, in stark contrast to Albert's jet black hair. He was emaciated and skeleton like, with a hoe in one hand and a watering can in the other. Albert had no idea why, but he felt like he had known the man for a lifetime.

Albert moved back from the window and proceeded outside, where it was raining. The droplets of life poured down upon the dirt and the earth, benevolently barraging Albert's cheeks and his vineyard that lay beside him. Not knowing who he was, or what he was supposed to do, he just stood there and admired the droplets. He must have been there for hours, collapsing just before the dead of night, staring at the natural beauty around him.

The disease had caught up with him, its most evolved form realized, and as he lay there, dying, he was able to see something spectacular: the budding of the Rogue de Morgue!

Perhaps it was a sign he needed to die, a symbol of the fruits of his labors and the crowning achievement of his life: more so than the billions he had accumulated, more so than his

four kids, more so than all the world. For in this one grape, in this one last lucid moment, he was afforded rememory. He was given his old self again.

He had died in the dead of midnight, where no one could see him and the grape exchanging life in the background of the dilapidated, deserted, and determined house.